

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: NOON BRIEFING, APRIL 7

FOLLOWING IS TRANSCRIPT OF TODAY'S NOON BRIEFING AS IT PERTAINS TO PANAMA:

Q. YOU WERE ASKED YESTERDAY IF YOU HAD ANYTHING REGARDING PANAMA'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT.

A. I'M SORRY BUT WHAT ARE YOU ASKING ME NOW?

Q. WHETHER THE UNITED STATES HAS ANY IMPRESSIONS ABOUT WHICH WAY PANAMA WILL GO CONCERNING THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT?

A. I THINK PANAMA STANDS WHERE IT HAS AS EXPRESSED IN A LETTER REFLECTED IN A PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE, THE LETTER BEING FROM GENERAL TORRIJOS TO PRESIDENT CARTER. THE COMMUNIQUE STATED THAT THE GOVERN-
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MENT OF PANAMA WAS GOING TO STUDY THE RESERVATIONS AND MAKE ITS POSITION ON THE MATTER KNOWN ONCE THE SENATE HAS VOTED ON BOTH TREATIES. THE COMMUNIQUE NOTED THAT THIS

OVERALL ASSESSMENT WAS GOING TO BE MADE IN THAT WAY BECAUSE THE PEOPLE OF PANAMA HAD NOT VOTED ON ONE SEPARATELY FROM THE OTHER BUT IN FACT FOR THE TWO TREATIES

TOGETHER AND THEREFORE ITS ASSESSMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE UPON THE PASSAGE OF BOTH TREATIES. I HAVE NO REASON AT THIS POINT TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE BACKED AWAY FROM THAT POSITION.

Q. BUT APPARENTLY SINCE THEN TORRIJOS HAS SENT A LETTER TO THE UN AND THERE WAS A REPORT THAT AMBASSADOR LEWIS THIS MORNING MET WITH CRANSTON AND CHURCH ON THIS THING. DO YOU HAVE A COPY OR HAS THE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED A COPY OF THIS LETTER? AND CAN YOU COMMENT ON THAT LETTER ITSELF?

A. I WOULD NOTE THAT WE HAVE OBVIOUSLY SEEN EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN. GENERAL TORRIJOS WE UNDERSTAND DID SEND LETTERS TO 115 HEADS OF STATE BRINGING THE RESERVATIONS TO THEIR ATTENTION AND STATING HIS GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN. THEY ALSO STATED HIS INTENTION TO WITHHOLD JUDGMENT UNTIL THE RATIFICATION PROCESS IS COMPLETED.

Q. DID HE DO SO IN THAT LETTER?

A. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT THAT IS SO. IT IS ALSO MY UNDERSTANDING IN ANY CASE THAT THAT IS THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE PANAMA GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS NOT BEEN CHANGED TO OUR KNOWLEDGE TO THIS POINT.

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Q. HODDING, D:CONCINI SAID LAST NIGHT THAT HE "WOULD HAVE TO BE SATISFIED BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE ON THE TREATY THAT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WILL ACCEPT AND ABIDE BY MY AMENDMENT" WHICH AS YOU KNOW PASSED THE SENATE BY A VOTE OF 68-32. I AM WONDERING WHETHER THE STATE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED ANYTHING AT ALL FROM THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT INDICATING THAT THEY WILL ACCEPT AND ABIDE BY THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT OR HAS IT ALL BEEN DEEP CONCERN AND APPARENT OBJECTION?

A. I THINK THAT WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID REFLECTS AS ACCURATELY AS I CAN THE CURRENT POSITION OF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND I AM NOT ABLE TO GO MUCH BEYOND THAT.

Q. I FOLLOW THAT UP BY SAYING THAT THE MARCH 28 PANAMANIAN NOTE TO THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL REPORTS THAT

GENERAL TORRIJOS HAS ADDRESSED THIS LETTER TO THE HEADS OF STATE. DOES THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION BELIEVE THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE PASSAGE OF THE SECOND TREATY IN THE SENATE WILL BE ENHANCED IF THE CONTENTS OF THIS

TORRIJOS LETTER IS NOT MADE PUBLIC?

A. I DON'T REALLY KNOW THAT I HAVE A POSITION TO OFFER YOU ON THAT AS TO WHETHER WE WOULD MAKE PUBLIC A LETTER WRITTEN BY SOMEONE ELSE TO SOMEONE ELSE. I THINK THAT THE ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE PANAMA CANAL TREATY -- THE SECOND ONE -- ARE FAIRLY CLEAR. BUT I DON'T WANT TO TRY TO TAKE UP A POSITION OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD.

Q. DOES IT SEEM REASONABLE TO THE SECRETARY TO ASSUME THAT IF BEFORE THE TREATY IS VOTED ON WE HAVE THIS GRUMBLING FROM PANAMA WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN AFTER IF THE TREATY IS RATIFIED. THEN WHAT?

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A. I REALLY CAN'T SPECULATE ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY THEN WHAT. I REALLY DON'T KNOW THAT ANY THEN WHAT WILL EMERGE.

Q. HAVE YOU BEEN ENGAGED IN ANY SPECIAL EFFORT NOW TO PULL RANKS FIRM IN THE SENATE REGARDLESS OF THIS LETTER FROM PANAMA?

A. I DON'T THINK THE DEPARTMENT HAS EVER GIVEN UP THE NOTION THAT WE HAVE A BATTLE ON OUR HANDS AS AN ADMINISTRATION ON THE PANAMA TREATY AND THAT WE INTEND TO KEEP THE SENATORS FULLY INFORMED AND TO TRY TO DEAL WITH WHATEVER PROBLEMS THAT MAY ARISE IN TERMS OF PROVIDING INFORMATION AND COUNSEL. WE WILL BE IN THAT POSTURE UNTIL APRIL 18.

Q. YOUR PUBLIC POSTURE NOW IS THAT NOTHING REALLY HAS CHANGED SINCE THE COMMUNIQUE -- THE TORRIJOS-CARTER COMMUNIQUE?

A. RIGHT.

Q. A NUMBER OF THINGS HAVE OBVIOUSLY CHANGED. ONE, YOU HAVE HAD ONE TREATY VOTED ON. YOU HAVE HAD A LETTER SENT TO 115 GOVERNMENTS WHICH IS A MILD EXPRESSION OF CONCERN. YOU HAVE HAD THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT PASSED.

A. WITH THE TREATIES.

Q. RIGHT. IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE QUITE THE SAME AND IT

ALL KIND OF . . .

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A. WELL, IN SOME WAYS THE PROBLEM IS WHAT YOU OFFER WHEN YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE INDIGESTION. I MEAN, YOU KNOW WE ARE JUST AT THE POINT RIGHT NOW OF TRYING TO GET THROUGH THE SECOND TREATY.

Q. IS THE DEPARTMENT TRYING TO DO ANYTHING TO RECONCILE ; THE PANAMANIAN TO ACCEPT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT?

A. WE HAVE OBVIOUSLY HAD CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM ON THE SUBJECT. BUT I AM NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO GO INTO SPECIFICS OF DISCUSSIONS HERE.

Q. YOU KEEP REFERRING TO THE COMMUNIQUE WHICH WAS SENT TO THE 115 HEADS OF STATE. THERE WAS A LETTER, IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING, THAT HAS GONE TO THE CHIEFS OF STATE OF THE OAS WHICH IS NOT AS QUITE A BLAND EXPRESSION OF CONCERN AND IN FACT POINTS TO WHAT IT REGARDS AS SPECIFIC VIOLATION OF BOTH THE OAS CHARTER AND THE RIO PACT. THAT IS THE EXPRESSION IS THAT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT IS A VIOLATION OR WILL BE A VIOLATION. IS THAT NOT A SOMEWHAT HARSHER EXPRESSION?

A. I AM PERFECTLY WILLING TO CONCEDE THAT THAT MAY HAVE BEEN. I AM NOT AWARE OF THE CONTENTS OF THAT LETTER. I MEAN, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE WAS SENT TO THE OAS AND THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN AN ACCOMPANYING LETTER. I DO NOT KNOW THE TEXT OF THAT ACCOMPANYING LETTER IF THERE IS IN FACT ONE.

Q. THE UNITED STATES IS A MEMBER OF THE OAS, ISN'T IT?

A. WELL, THAT IS VERY TRUE. I AM NOT SURE IN THIS CASE THAT SOMETHING INVOLVING THE TWO PARTIES WHETHER THEY WOULD FEEL IT NECESSARY TO SEND SUCH A LETTER TO US SINCE THEY WERE DISCUSSING SOMETHING, I DON'T KNOW, I DON'T HAVE A COPY OF THAT LETTER.

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Q. HAVE WE TRIED TO PERSUADE THE PANAMANIAN TO ACCEPT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT? DID THE STATE DEPARTMENT OPPOSE THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT WHEN IT FIRST CAME UP?

A. YOU KNOW, I CAN'T NOW GO BACK AND GO OVER THE WHOLE BIDDING ON THIS THING BECAUSE I DON'T REMEMBER ON EACH

ONE OF THE AMENDMENTS WHAT OUR SPECIFIC POSITION WAS. I HAVE A FEELING THAT AT THE TIME WE HAVE SAID ALL ALONG THAT OUR POSITION WAS THAT WE DID NOT NEED AMENDMENTS AND

RESERVATIONS AND THAT THAT WAS A CONSISTENT POSITION ON THIS ONE AS WELL AS ON OTHERS.

Q. RIGHT. THEN IF YOUR POSITION IS THAT THERE WAS NO NEED FOR AN AMENDMENT YOUR ANSWER TO MY QUESTION IS OF COURSE WE ARE NOT ASKING THE PANAMANIAN TO ACCEPT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT BECAUSE WE OPPOSED IT OURSELVES? IS THAT CORRECT?

A. NO, AS A MATTER OF FACT WE HAVE OBVIOUSLY ACCEPTED THE TREATY WHICH WAS PASSED.

Q. YOU HAD NO ALTERNATIVE. I MEAN, THE SENATE VOTED 68 TO 32. YOU HAVE ACCEPTED IT. YOU HAD TO, DIDN'T YOU?

A. WE NOT ONLY HAD TO. WE WERE GLAD TO.

Q. YOU WERE GLAD TO ACCEPT THE DECONCINI AMENDMENT?

A. OF COURSE, WE WERE GLAD TO ACCEPT THE 68 TO 32 VOTE BY WHICH IT PASSED DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF A NUMBER OF PEOPLE I CAN THINK OF. (LAUGHTER)
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Q. ARE YOU GOING TO SAY ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT THE FACT THAT A BASICALLY BILATERAL ISSUE HAS BEEN TAKEN TO THE UN WITHOUT, BEFORE IT IS EVEN RESOLVED?

A. I WOULDN'T EXPRESS ANY OFFICIAL CONCERN ABOUT THAT.

Q. NOR ANY JUDGMENT AT ALL ABOUT THAT?

A. I WOULDN'T HAVE ANY JUDGMENT. VANCE

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